MARVEL

26

"IT'S COMING!"

2 MONTHS UNTIL

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AVENGERS VS X-MEN
APRIL 2012

AVX

WHO KILLED JOCASTA?

AVENGERS ACADEMY

GAGE
GRUMMETT
HAMSCHER
SOTOMAYOR

AVENGERS ACADEMY

AND THERE CAME A DAY, A DAY UNLIKE ANY OTHER, WHEN EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES OPENED THEIR DOORS TO TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION! ON THAT DAY, THE AVENGERS ACADEMY WAS BORN, TO TRAIN YOUNG ADULTS TO FIGHT THE FOES NO SINGLE SUPER HERO COULD WITHSTAND!

FINESSE

PHOTOGRAPHIC FIGHTER. ALL HEAD, NO HEART.

HAZMAT

HUMAN TOXIC SPILL. CAUSTIC PERSONALITY.

LIGHTSPEED

ABLE TO FLY. LOOKING TO BE MORE GROUNDED.

METTLE

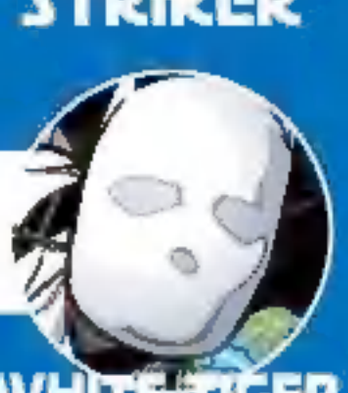
STEEL-SKINNED POWERHOUSE. ARMORED SHELL PROTECTING INNER FEELINGS.

REPTIL

DINOSAUR MURPHER. FUTURE-HEAD OR NAIVE OPTIMIST?

STRIKER

ELECTRIC DYNAMO. SELF-PROMOTES THROUGH SHOCK TACTICS.



WHITE TIGER

POWERED BY MYSTICAL AMULET. FUELED BY FAMILY PRIDE.

HANK PYM RECENTLY RELOCATED THE ACADEMY TO THE NEWLY REFURBISHED WEST COAST AVENGERS COMPOUND AND OPENED THE SCHOOL'S DOORS FOR NEW STUDENTS. SOON AFTER THE MOVE, THE ANDROID AVENGER KNOWN AS **JOCASTA** WAS BRUTALLY MURDERED...HER KILLER UNKNOWN.

DURING A BATTLE TO DEFEND THE CAMPUS, THE STAFF AND PUPILS WERE STUNNED BY THE SUDDEN REAPPEARANCE OF JOCASTA – SOMEHOW ALIVE – AND EX-STUDENT **VEIL**, WHO DECLARED THEY WERE THERE TO SHUT DOWN THE AVENGERS ACADEMY!

GIANT-MAN

SIZE-CHANGING SCIENTIST SUPREME.

HAWKEYE

CANNOT MISS. NOW AIMING AT TEACHING.

TIGRA

CAT WOMAN. ENHANCED STRENGTH, AGILITY AND ATTITUDE.

QUICKSILVER

SURLY SPEEDSTER.

JOCASTA

SYNTHETIC BEING, LOYAL TO GIANT-MAN... OR ULTRON?

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JOCASTA. LET ME EXAMINE YOU. SOMETHING'S **WRONG**. TO FAKE YOUR DEATH...**DECEIVE** US ALL...YOU'RE BEING **MANIPULATED**.

HOW TYPICALLY **CONDESCENDING**, HENRY. NO ONE WHO DISAGREES WITH YOU COULD POSSIBLY BE IN THEIR **RIGHT MIND**, COULD THEY?

AND YET I AM NOT THE ONE WHO NEARLY GOT DOZENS OF CHILDREN **KILLED** IN A DESPERATE, VAIN ATTEMPT TO MOLD THEM IN MY IMAGE.

IT WAS **FOR YOU** THAT I FOCUSED ALL MY ANALYTICAL POWER ONTO THE QUESTION OF WHAT IS BEST FOR YOUR STUDENTS.

THERE IS NO DISPUTING MY CONCLUSION. THE OPTIMAL OUTCOME--THE ONLY **VIABLE** SCENARIO--IS THAT **AVENGERS ACADEMY CEASE TO EXIST**.

NICE SPEECH. BUT I CAN'T HELP NOTICING YOU'RE HERE WITH VEIL, WHO I LAST SAW QUITTING AVENGERS ACADEMY TO TAKE A HIGH-PAYING JOB WITH **JEREMY BRIGGS**.

IT'S OBVIOUS THE LITTLE SOCIOPATH IS BANKROLLING YOU, TOO. WHERE IS HE?

COME NOW, GREER. YOU THINK **MONEY** HOLDS ANY APPEAL FOR ME? OR THAT JEREMY'S ABILITY TO TRANSFORM CHEMICALS COULD UNDULY INFLUENCE MY CONCLUSIONS?

I THINK IF HE DIDN'T HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE, HE'D BE HERE.

HE KNEW YOU'D BE LIKE *THIS*. THAT'S WHY HE STAYED AWAY.

AGAIN, I'D BE MUCH LESS SUSPICIOUS OF YOUR MOTIVES IF I COULD ANALYZE YOUR SYSTEMS.

AND "REPAIR" ANYTHING YOU FIND OBJECTIONABLE? I THINK NOT.

ESCAPING YOUR INTERFERENCE IS THE VERY REASON I FELT COMPELLED TO FAKE MY DEATH, WHILE I WORKED WITH JEREMY TO CONSTRUCT AN ALTERNATIVE TO AVENGERS ACADEMY.

SO YOU'RE HERE TO SHUT US DOWN? HOW? 'CAUSE WE AIN'T ABOUT TO CLOSE ON ***YOUR*** SAY-SO.

YOU'VE BEEN DRINKING ***WONDER MAN'S*** KOOL-AID. HAVEN'T YOU? I WAS THERE WHEN HIS BAND OF PSYCHOS ATTACKED THE AVENGERS.* IF YOU THINK--

CALM YOURSELF, CLINT. I HAVE NO CONNECTION TO SIMON. HE MADE VALID POINTS, BUT ACTED RASHLY AND WITH EXCESSIVE EMOTION.

*IN THE AVENGERS AND NEW AVENGERS ANNUALS! –READ 'EM BOTH ROSEMANN

I AM NOT HERE TO FIGHT, BUT TO DISABLE THE TECHNOLOGY THAT I INSTALLED. IN OTHER WORDS, ALL OF IT.

IF YOU INSIST ON PURSUING THIS SUICIDAL COURSE, IT WILL BE WITHOUT MY ASSISTANCE.

AND IF YOU INSIST ON PLAYING THE ***SELF-RIGHTEOUS MORALIST***, YOU WILL DO SO WITHOUT ANNOYING ***US***.

THIS EQUIPMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF THE AVENGERS. YOU WILL LEAVE IT--AND OUR CAMPUS--WITH ALL DELIBERATE SPEED.

I'M SORRY, PIETRO. I'M AFRAID I CAN'T DO THAT.

SHREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

THIS WILL CAUSE NO LASTING DAMAGE. CLEARLY I HAVE NO WISH TO HARM YOU. I JUST SAVED ALL YOUR LIVES.

AS SOON AS I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED MY TASK, THE DISCOMFORT WILL END.

SORRY. I THINK THIS DISCOMFORT'S GONNA LAST A WHILE.

I HATE THAT IT'S COME TO THIS, BUT WELL DONE, HAZMAT.

WE NEED TO SUBDUE JOCASTA QUICKLY.

NO! STOP! YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS!

BUT THEY DO, MADDY.

THAT'S THE WHOLE PROBLEM...

HARDBALL

WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE A HERO, EVERYONE ELSE LOOKS LIKE A VILLAIN.

PRODIGY

CLOUD NINE

KOMODO

SERIOUSLY? YOU INITIATIVE KIDS ARE ALL WITH BRIGGS NOW?

HAS EVERYONE GONE INSANE?

NO. THEY'RE COMING TO THEIR SENSES. SLOWLY BUT SURELY.

AND IF YOU GUYS ARE SPOILING FOR A FIGHT, WE'LL GIVE YOU ONE.

KZZAZZ

WILL YOU ALL STOP IT?!

THEN BRING IT, YOU LITTLE--

WHAM

WE JUST GOT DONE FIGHTING FOR OUR LIVES. ISN'T THERE ANOTHER WAY TO DO THIS?

REPTIL'S RIGHT... THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY TO WORK THIS OUT.

PLEASE. THIS IS WHY I LEFT.

CAN'T WE BE *BETTER?*

JOCASTA...IF YOU'LL LET A NEUTRAL THIRD PARTY RUN A SCAN TO BE SURE YOU'RE NOT BEING INFLUENCED, I'LL BE GLAD TO LET YOU DELETE YOUR OWN WORK.

NOT THE OUTCOME I'D PREFER. BUT ACCEPTABLE. ON ONE CONDITION.

HAWKEYE ASKED HOW I PLANNED TO SHUT AVENGERS ACADEMY DOWN. THE ANSWER IS, QUITE SIMPLY, BY PRESENTING A BETTER WAY.

THE STUDENTS MUST BE ALLOWED TO HEAR WHAT WE ARE DOING AND DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES IF THEY WISH TO JOIN US.

YOU EXPECT US TO ALLOW YOU TO RECRUIT *OUR STUDENTS* ON *OUR SOIL*--

QUICKSILVER. IF WE REFUSE, IT'LL SEEM LIKE WE HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE. SOMETHING TO BE AFRAID OF. AND WE *DON'T.*

JOCASTA, WE HAVE A DEAL.

SEE? WE'RE EVOLVING ALREADY.

ALL RIGHT. THEN WHO DO YOU TRUST TO RUN DIAGNOSTICS ON YOUR MACHINE TEEN IS A ROBOTIC INTELLIGENCE AS WELL...HE SEEMS AN OBVIOUS CHOICE.

ME? UH, I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHAT'S GOING ON.

NO OFFENSE TO THE YOUNG MAN, BUT I WOULD PREFER A TRULY IMPARTIAL JUDGE. ONE UNENCUMBERED BY EMOTIONS.

JUSTON, WOULD YOU MIND IF WE EMPLOYED YOUR SENTINEL?

WELL, NO... BUT WE NEED TO FISH HIS HEAD OUT OF THE OCEAN AND PUT HIM BACK TOGETHER.

THAT SHOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM. PROVIDED DR. PYM AGREES WITH THE CHOICE.

ALL RIGHT.

REPAIRING THE SENTINEL MIGHT TAKE A WHILE. AND I DON'T WANT BRIGGS HERE ANY LONGER THAN NECESSARY.

SO GO AHEAD. WHILE I PICK UP THE PIECES...

...SAY WHAT YOU'VE COME TO SAY.

WE ALL WANT TO SAVE THE WORLD.

SO TELL ME, WHAT ARE THE AVENGERS DOING ABOUT ***GLOBAL WARMING?*** HUMAN TRAFFICKING? THE MILLIONS OF KIDS WHO DIE OF ***PREVENTABLE DISEASES*** EACH YEAR?

THEY MEAN WELL. BUT THEY'RE STUCK IN SIMPLISTIC, OLD WAYS OF THINKING. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE.

OBVIOUSLY ***SOMEONE*** HAS TO FIGHT DR. DOOM. BUT SHOULD IT BE ***YOU?***

I'M NOT THE HULK. I TURN INTO GASES. ALL I DID AGAINST DARK ASGARD WAS CHOKE BAD GUYS TO DEATH. WHICH I'M STILL TAKING ANTIDEPRESSANTS FOR.

NOW JEREMY AND I ARE WORKING ON A WAY TO CURE ***AUTISM***. AND I'M GETTING PAID ENOUGH TO BUY MY MOM A HOUSE.

YOU WERE ALMOST KILLED BY A PREDATOR WHO TARGETED AVENGERS ACADEMY. NOT LONG AGO, AT THE X-MEN'S SCHOOL, 45 STUDENTS WERE MURDERED IN A SINGLE ATTACK.

A SUPERHUMAN YOUTH AT A SCHOOL FOR SUPERHUMANS IS TWENTY TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE BY VIOLENCE THAN ONE LIVING AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN.

I'M AN EXPERT ON STUPID HERO FIGHTS. I WRECKED VEGAS IN ONE. THE CITY WAS MOSTLY EVACUATED. BUT I CAN'T DENY PEOPLE PROBABLY DIED BECAUSE OF ME.

THE GOVERNMENT WANTED TO HIDE ME AWAY. JEREMY OFFERED ME A CHANCE TO ATONE. TO MAKE A ***REAL*** DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

IF YOU FEEL TRAPPED...BY YOUR POWERS, YOUR PARENTS, ***WHATEVER***...JEREMY CAN HELP.

AND YOU CAN WORK ON WHATEVER YOU CARE MOST ABOUT. I'M CLOSE TO FINDING THE KEY TO REGROWING MISSING LIMBS.

I FINALLY GET TO USE MY POWERS HOWEVER I WANT, TO HELP PEOPLE THE WAY I THINK IS BEST. I KEEP WAITING FOR THE CATCH, BUT THERE ISN'T ONE. THIS IS FOR REAL.

I HAVE ANALYZED THE DATA MANY TIMES, IN COUNTLESS WAYS. AVENGERS ACADEMY IS A DEAD END. WE OFFER A FUTURE.

THIS IS NOT OPINION. IT IS ***SCIENCE.***

I DON'T KNOW. MY DAD ROSE ABOVE VIOLENCE. HE WANTED THE SAME FOR ME. BUT SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA THROW DOWN.

YOU MIGHT HAVE A POINT. *MIGHT.*

POWER MAN

REFUSE TO BE A WARRIOR?

WHY?

LYRA

SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, PRODIGY, IS IF I JOIN YOUR SIDE I CAN PUT MYSELF FIRST. LIKE *YOU* ALWAYS HAVE.

I TRIED THAT ONCE. AND MY BEST FRIEND DIED BECAUSE I WASN'T THERE WHEN HE NEEDED ME. YOU REMEMBER OUR PAL EDDIE? THE GUY WHOSE FUNERAL YOU SKIPPED?

NO THANKS. I'D RATHER BE PART OF A TEAM OF PEOPLE WHO *GIVE A DAMN* ABOUT EACH OTHER.

RICOCHET

YOU REALLY THINK I COULD BE NORMAL AGAIN?

BATWING

I HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD. THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM?

AND IT PAYS *HOW MUCH?*

ROCKET RACER

I DON'T GET IT. COSTUMES ARE AWESOME. *SUPER HEROES* ARE AWESOME.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO WEAR NORMAL CLOTHES AND BE A REGULAR PERSON WHEN YOU CAN BE A *SUPER HERO?*

BUTTERBALL

WITH JEREMY, I'M MY OWN BOSS. I NEVER HAVE TO PICK UP A GUN AGAIN. I CAN JUST FLY. AS A PAYING JOB.

IF I'■ BEEN HERE DURING THE BLITZ ON WASHINGTON, YOU'D HAVE WANTED ME TO BE A SNIPER. DON'T EVEN TRY TO TELL ME I'M WRONG.

SO...YOU'RE STILL PRETTY SERIOUS ABOUT THIS, HUH?

I MEANT EVERY WORD. IT FEELS LIKE I FINALLY FIGURED OUT WHERE I BELONG.

OKAY, BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S FOR EVERYONE? YOU'RE KINDA BEING LIKE THOSE PEOPLE WHO GET MARRIED AND ALL OF A SUDDEN WANT EVERYONE ELSE TO.

I DON'T CARE WHAT PEOPLE DO. I TOLD THEM WHAT I THOUGHT, NOW IT'S UP TO THEM.

NO, THAT'S A LIE. I CARE WHAT YOU DO.

YOU DON'T WANT TO BE A SUPER HERO. YOU WANT TO BE FAMOUS. I'M AFRAID YOU'RE GOING TO STAY HERE FOR THE PUBLICITY, AND YOU'RE GOING TO GET KILLED.

AND I DON'T THINK I COULD STAND THAT, BRANDON.

SO I'M GAY.

WELL, DUH.

FINESSE. VEIL TELLS ME YOU ADMITTED YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN WRONG ABOUT ME.

WHAT I SAID IS THAT I HAD NO DIRECT EVIDENCE YOU COMMITTED A CRIME. AND I DO NOT.

BUT I KNOW YOU'RE A *MURDERER.*

GET OUT OF MY SIGHT.

YOU STILL THINK YOU COULD MAKE US NORMAL AGAIN? ME AND METTLE?

ABSOLUTELY. JUST COME WITH ME.

KEN WON'T. I JUST TALKED TO HIM ABOUT IT. HE'D FEEL EVEN MORE OUT OF PLACE AT AN OFFICE...A PLACE FOR **NORMAL** PEOPLE...THAN HE DOES HERE.

HE'S GIVEN UP ON EVER BEING HUMAN AGAIN. AND I THINK THERE MIGHT BE...OTHER REASONS.

I'M NOT EVEN SURE HE'S WRONG. MAYBE... MAYBE HE COULD BE HAPPY HERE. IF...

THESE ARE PIECES OF METTLE'S BODY. THEY BROKE OFF WHEN X-23 STABBED HIM.

HE WON'T GO WITH YOU.

BUT IF YOU'LL PROMISE TO WORK ON FIXING HIM, I WILL.

JOCASTA_ IF THIS IS ABOUT US. OR ME [redacted] TIGRA--

PLEASE, HENRY. YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT.

THEN WHERE IS THIS COMING FROM? THE AVENGERS ARE YOUR *FAMILY*. WE GAVE YOU [redacted] PLACE TO BELONG.

YES, AND I AM GRATEFUL.

THE AVENGERS HAVE ALSO BEEN THE CAUSE OF MUCH PAIN IN MY SHORT EXISTENCE. AND I BELIEVE THEY HAVE HELD BACK MY DEVELOPMENT AS A SENTIENT BEING.

ONE MIGHT ARGUE THE SAME FOR YOU.

YOU HAVE QUIT THE AVENGERS SEVERAL TIMES. TO PURSUE SCIENCE EXCLUSIVELY, OR TO BENEFIT YOUR MARRIAGE.

RETURNING ONLY WHEN YOU FELT INSECURE, THE CHALLENGES BECAME TOO DAUNTING, OR YOU HAD NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHERE YOU MIGHT BE TODAY HAD YOU NOT RUN TO THE COMFORT OF A FAMILIAR PLACE EVERY TIME YOU FELT WEAK?

WE'RE FINISHED.

SENTINEL, ARE YOU RECEIVING?

AFFIRMATIVE.

THEN PROCEED WITH THE REQUESTED PROTOCOL.

VIRUS SCAN: NEGATIVE. TAMPER SCAN: NEGATIVE. EXTERNAL INFLUENCE: NEGATIVE.

I TRUST YOU ARE SATISFIED, HENRY?

YES

AS PROMISED, YOU [redacted] TAP INTO OUR MAINFRAME AND REMOVE ALL YOUR WORK.

WHILE YOU DO, THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SAY TO EVERYONE.

I BELIEVE IN THE AVENGERS.

WE CAME TOGETHER TO FACE THREATS NO SINGLE INDIVIDUAL COULD WITHSTAND. TO MAKE THE WORLD A SAFER PLACE.

PERHAPS IT WAS A SIMPLER TIME. PERHAPS WE WERE NAIVE.

JOCASTA JUST ASKED ME WHERE I'D BE WITHOUT THE AVENGERS. I'VE THOUGHT LONG AND HARD ABOUT THAT. AND I KNOW, WITHOUT QUESTION...

I'D BE *DEAD*.

OR INSANE. OR IN PRISON. OR JUST NOT DOING ANYONE MUCH GOOD.

THE AVENGERS HAVE SAVED THE WORLD COUNTLESS TIMES.

BUT THEY'VE ALSO SAVED *ME*.

HAVE I FACED *HARD TIMES* AS A RESULT OF BEING AN AVENGER? DEFINITELY.

BUT I'VE ALSO EXPERIENCED SOME OF THE *GREATEST MOMENTS* OF MY LIFE. SEEN AND DONE THINGS NO OTHER SCIENTIST CAN EVEN IMAGINE.

I'VE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF FIGHTING BESIDE SOME OF THE GREATEST HEROES--AND *BEST FRIENDS*--THE WORLD'S EVER SEEN.

AND I'VE FOUND HAPPINESS. MORE THAN I PROBABLY DESERVE.

IF I'D NEVER BECOME AN AVENGER, I MIGHT HAVE LIVED A QUIET, CONTENTED, PRODUCTIVE LIFE AS A RESEARCHER.

BUT IT'S JUST AS LIKELY I'D HAVE STRUGGLED WITH THE SAME DEMONS--DEPRESSION, MENTAL ILLNESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS--AND NEVER MADE IT OUT THE OTHER SIDE.

AND I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD THE GREAT HONOR OF TEACHING *YOU*.

NONE OF YOU ARE REQUIRED TO BE HERE. ■ YOU'D RATHER LIVE A NORMAL LIFE, OR WALK YOUR OWN PATH, THAT'S *YOUR* DECISION. ONE I WILL SUPPORT IN EVERY WAY.

IS THERE *RISK* IN BEING INVOLVED WITH THE AVENGERS? ABSOLUTELY. *LIFE* ITSELF IS RISK. ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU HAVE POWERS.

IF YOU'LL LET ME, I PROMISE TO TAKE EVERY POSSIBLE STEP TO PROTECT YOU, AND--MORE IMPORTANTLY--TRAIN YOU TO FACE ■■■ CHALLENGES THAT COME YOUR WAY.

WHAT I TAKE ISSUE WITH IS THE NOTION THAT THE AVENGERS ARE ■■ *OUTDATED* CONCEPT.

THE AVENGERS HAVE MADE ME A FAR BETTER MAN THAN I EVER WOULD HAVE BEEN WITHOUT THEM.

AND I HAVE YET TO MEET A PERSON INVOLVED WITH THE AVENGERS WHO IS NOT BETTER FOR THAT ASSOCIATION.

MY CONCERNS ABOUT JEREMY BRIGGS ASIDE, IS THE APPROACH YOU'RE TAKING NOW A VALID ONE? WITHOUT A DOUBT.

BUT SO IS *OURS*.

YES. WE SAVE THE WORLD. YES, WE FIGHT ENEMIES NO OTHER FORCE COULD BATTLE...CERTAINLY NOT ■ *CORPORATION*. BUT BEYOND THAT...

THE AVENGERS *INSPIRE* PEOPLE. TO PERSEVERE WHEN EVERY FIBER OF THEIR BEING SAYS, "GIVE UP."

WE ARE A *SYMBOL* OF PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT RACES, NATIONS, EVEN DIFFERENT *SPECIES* WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

WE MAKE THE WORLD ■ BETTER PLACE. WE MAKE THOSE WHO JOIN US BETTER PEOPLE.

I WILL BELIEVE THAT UNTIL THE DAY I DIE.

THAT'S ALL I HAVE TO SAY. THANK YOU.

OKAY, WE'VE ALL MADE OUR PITCHES. TIME FOR YOU GUYS TO DECIDE--

HOLD ON. CAN I JUST--

I'LL KEEP IT SHORT. I JUST CAME FROM THE *FUTURE*. VEIL WAS BACK WITH US. WE WERE ALL TOGETHER. AS TEAMMATES, AS FRIENDS--

W[redacted] WERE *TOGETHER*.

I GOT THE FEELING THINGS WENT DIFFERENTLY FOR THEM. THAT THEY FACED [redacted] ALONE. AND A BUNCH OF US DIED. AND THAT'S WHAT MADE THEM PUT ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES.

THEN I GET BACK HERE, AND SEE US BEAT HYBRID, BY WORKING TOGETHER. BECAUSE MY FUTURE SELF CALLED YOU, WE DID SOMETHING NEITHER OF US COULD'VE DONE ALONE.

CAN'T WE LEARN THE SAME LESSON WITHOUT PEOPLE DYING?

WE MIGHT WANT TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T STAY IN TOUCH. HELP EACH OTHER, WHEN IT MAKES SENSE.

JOCASTA...IT'S BASIC STRATEGY, RIGHT? WE CAN ACCOMPLISH MORE *TOGETHER* THAN APART?

JEREMY, YOU SAY YOU REJECT THE OLD WAYS OF THINKING. SO DO I.

I REJECT ANYTHING THAT SAYS I CAN'T SEE MY *FRIENDS* BECAUSE WE DON'T THINK *EXACTLY* *THE SAME WAY*.

I LOVE IT.

TOTALLY POST-POST-MODERN. TRANSCENDING LABELS ALTOGETHER.

I LOVE IT!

HE MAKES A LOT OF SENSE. I...I'D HATE TO LEAVE THINGS HOSTILE BETWEEN US.

WE DID DEFEAT HYBRID BY COMBINING ALL OUR STRENGTHS. IT'S TO OUR MUTUAL ADVANTAGE TO COOPERATE AT TIMES.

THEN IT'S DECIDED. WE STAY IN TOUCH. AND WE HELP EACH OTHER.

JUST ONE THING. I'LL DEAL WITH YOU. NOT HIM.

DUDE! EVEN IF ALL THOSE NASTY THINGS YOU THINK ABOUT ME WERE TRUE, I THOUGHT YOU WERE ALL ABOUT REDEMPTION!

TO BE REDEEMED YOU HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE.

AND YOU HAVE TO BE SORRY.

ALL RIGHT, THEN. I GUESS THE ONLY THING LEFT TO DECIDE IS...

...WHO'S STAYING AND WHO'S GOING?

I'VE SEEN WHAT THE WHITE TIGER MEANS TO HISPANIC KIDS. ESPECIALLY IN PLACES LIKE WHERE I GREW UP.

MY BROTHER GAVE HIS LIFE TO BUILD THAT LEGACY. AND NOW I'M SUPPOSED TO THROW IT ALL AWAY FOR A *PAYCHECK?*

YOU WHITE KIDS ALL WATCH "SCARFACE" OBSESSIVELY. PICK SOME SPANISH CURSES AND IMAGINE ME SAYING THEM TO YOU.

THE WHITE TIGER

I DO NOT CARE FOR FACILITIES THAT CONDUCT RESEARCH.

HERE, I COME AND GO AS I PLEASE. THAT SUITS ME. FOR *NOW.*

X-23

I LOVE THAT WE'RE GOING TO WORK TOGETHER. I HAVE FRIENDS HERE...MY CAREER. SO I'M STAYING AT THE ACADEMY. BUT I HAVE FAMILY IN NEW YORK.

I MIGHT COME VISIT YOU GUYS SOMETIMES.

LIGHTSPEED

THIS FACE? HIDDEN AWAY IN AN OFFICE? *PLEASE.*

I'M STAYING. THAT SHOULDN'T SURPRISE ANYONE. BUT, VEIL...THIS DOESN'T HAVE TO JUST GO ONE WAY. YOU COULD COME BACK TO US.

I MADE MY CHOICE, 'BERTO. IT WAS THE RIGHT ONE.

MAYBE WE'LL BE TOGETHER AGAIN SOMEDAY. BUT IF WE ARE, I DOUBT IT'LL BE HERE.

I'M GOING TOO.

I APPRECIATE ALL YOU'VE DONE FOR ME, BUT I'VE GOT SIX BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO PUT THROUGH SCHOOL. AND I'M REALLY MORE OF AN ENGINEER THAN A SUPER HERO.

AND I CAME HERE TO WORK WITH JOCASTA. LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MACHINE INTELLIGENCE. I'M SORRY, DR. PYM.

DON'T BE. I WISH YOU BOTH THE BEST. YOU'RE WELCOME BACK ANY TIME.

JENNY? WHAT'RE YOU--

COME ON. YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS!

I... I HAVE TO.

NO. YOU DON'T.

JENNY, COME ON. I DON'T WANT ANYONE WITH ME WHO DOESN'T *WANT* TO BE THERE. IF YOUR HEART'S HERE, STAY. MY DOOR'S ALWAYS OPEN.

AND I'LL STILL TAKE CARE OF THAT PROJECT FOR YOU.

YOU WILL?

OF COURSE.

ONLY GOOD CAN COME OF IT.

I WILL NOT LIE TO YOU, HENRY. I AGREED TO MAINTAIN CONTACT BECAUSE I HOPE I MAY YET CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU ARE HARMING THESE CHILDREN...

OR MITIGATE THE DAMAGE WHEN YOU LEARN IT THE HARD WAY.

FUNNY. THAT'S HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU.

THEN WE HAVE FOUND SOMETHING TO AGREE ON TODAY.

PERHAPS THERE IS YET HOPE FOR TOMORROW.

TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW.

I KNOW HE FAILED YOU. BUT 'BERTO DESERVES BETTER THAN THIS.

I'LL DO ALL I CAN. IF HIS MIND IS IN THERE SOMEWHERE, I'LL REACH IT.

AND HE DIDN'T *FAIL*, MADELEINE.

BUT HE DIDN'T MAKE THINGS WORK OUT THE WAY WE REMEMBER. IT WAS AFTER HYBRID KILLED ALL THOSE STUDENTS THAT EVERYTHING CHANGED FOR US.

THAT *YOU* CHANGED. AND REALIZED WE ALL NEEDED TO WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE THE WORLD SAFE.

THAT'S THE GENIUS BEHIND WHAT REPTIL DID. HE SET THEM ON THE SAME PATH, WITHOUT THE FATALITIES. IT MIGHT TAKE A BIT LONGER TO GET HERE, BUT THEY WILL.

IN FACT, ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, THEIR WORLD IS NOW ***MORE*** LIKELY TO BECOME OURS THAN IT WAS BEFORE WE SENT REPTIL BACK. THE THINGS THAT MATTER WILL STILL HAPPEN.

THE TIMESTREAM ISN'T AN ALL-OR-NOTHING PROPOSITION. THERE ARE ***MANY*** FUTURES. ACHIEVING YOUR GOAL IS ABOUT MAKING SOME MORE LIKELY THAN OTHERS.

THANKS TO WHAT REPTIL DID, MY INSTRUMENTS NOW SHOW THAT, NOT JUST IN THIS REALITY, BUT IN ***COUNTLESS*** OTHERS...

AFTER SCHOOL SPECIAL

JAKE THOMAS
ASST. EDITOR

BILL ROSEMANN
EDITOR

AXEL ALONSO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

JOE QUESADA
CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER

DAN BUCKLEY
PUBLISHER

ALAN FINE
EXEC. PRODUCER

This issue I wanted to answer a well-written response to someone who takes exception to Striker's revelation in issue #23:

Mr. Gage,

You were my favorite comic book writer and AVENGERS ACADEMY was my favorite mainstream comic book. This is just a note to let you know that issue #23 will be my last.

I'm not mad at you or the creative team on AVENGERS ACADEMY. It's just that I have had it with mainstream comic book creators trading storytelling for politics. Yes, I'm talking about Academy transforming from a fun teen super hero book into a showcase for alternate lifestyles. I don't care if anyone practices an alternate lifestyle. However, I don't want to see those lifestyles portrayed among minors in mainstream super hero comics. In books where people lift tanks, wear capes and shoot heat beams out of their eyes, why would you insert alternate sexual lifestyles? It's like giving Little Orphan Annie AIDS.

Mainstream super hero comic books should be fun, dramatic, sometimes soapy adventure stories. If you want to have multi-page conversations on sexuality, please do it in independent comics or books clearly marked for adults, not super hero books about minors. The whole world, really, has gone crazy. I am not the audience for this stuff anymore, but that doesn't make it right or the subject matter appropriate for an all-ages book. Or even "T," as this book was rated.

If you truly want to help kids who you think need assistance or comfort while coming out, I admire your compassion. Why not volunteer for a hotline of some kind? Or donate money to an organization which serves that function? Please don't alienate half or more of your audience by pushing your political views on us. You haven't done that in the past, which is what is most frustrating. I have followed your work for years. On the message boards you frequent, it is obvious you are on the progressive end of the political spectrum. That's great, and is entirely your right. I was always happy that you did not infuse your work or your character's attitudes with a dogmatically progressive point of view, like so many other creators. Until now. You really made up for years of moderation and constraint all at once by taking a super hero book and making it your political soapbox. And to add insult to injury, the villains of this issue were American religious nuts (probably Christians) killing folks for God. Thanks for that.

The letters page in AA #23 pats Marvel on the back for featuring so many gay characters, and that is true. Why add more? Is every issue now going to have many pages of people talking about their alternate lifestyles? Full-page kissing scenes? Intimacy close-ups? How far are you going to push this on your audience? And what about heterosexuals? When is the last time you saw an opposite-sex kiss in a comic? Months? Years?

If you really want to address a minority in comics, how about featuring a conservative, Christian or businessman? Oh, I'm sorry, a conservative, Christian or businessman that isn't a villain/racist/homophobe/monster? Please consider that a polite challenge.

In your comments on the letters page of AA #23, you say AA needs more readers. Sales are down, budgets have been cut and the book has lost two fan-favorite artists. THIS is how you fix things? Since I am dropping the book, you now have to find two progressive readers, one to replace me and one to help the book grow. I don't think that helps AVENGERS ACADEMY. Again, there is an appropriate place for alternate sexuality or any adult storyline: independent, creator-owned or adult-rated comics. Not mainstream super hero books.

I have nothing against the creative team on AVENGERS ACADEMY. It breaks my heart to give up a book I have enjoyed so much. I am not suggesting a boycott, and I don't recommend people stop buying books they enjoy. But you should not have infused a teen super hero book with your pet sexual/political themes. That is not what I want to read, so I am voting with my wallet. And no offense, but now I don't want to read your other mainstream work either. It's not that I want to punish you; it's just that the bond of trust between creator and reader has been broken. I can't trust that you will put your politics aside and just tell a good story. Will you make your other books political? Will your characters curse conservatives and trash opposing political parties like other Marvel books? In the past I would have said no. Now I'm not so sure. Perhaps I will sample your work again sometime in the future to see if it is exclusively progressive politics and controversy.

Mr. Gage, you are a great writer. Please go back to writing age-appropriate stories for all of your readers, not just the politically correct ones.

Respectfully,

Jerry Smith
Erlanger, KY

Jerry, first of all, I really appreciate your polite and respectful tone. Even though this clearly upset you, you didn't resort to the name-calling or personal attacks that have unfortunately become an all too common part of people disagreeing nowadays. So thanks for that...I appreciate not only your letting me know how you feel, but the way you did so.

You're right, I generally try to keep politics out of my comics, in large part because I don't want to alienate readers, but also because I find the state of political discourse today disturbingly hostile and off-putting. I do try to write characters as they have been previously portrayed, or, if I created them, as diverse human beings. I write Hank Pym as an atheist because he was established to be one years ago. In my first comics work, a Deadshot miniseries for DC, I wrote Green Arrow as a liberal, because that's an established part of who he is. (I was actually quite pleased when one fan assumed I was a conservative gun enthusiast due to my portrayal of Deadshot.) I would describe my personal politics as center-left, but I would hope that doesn't affect anyone's enjoyment of my work any more than it affects my enjoyment of the work of conservative comics creators like Bill Willingham, Chuck Dixon or Ethan Van Sciver, all brilliant talents and really nice folks.

I would argue that the discussion of sexuality in #23 was not out of place in this book. We had Hazmat and Mettle about to have sex in #21, Tigra and Giant-Man in bed together in #13, and Hazmat making it clear that her powers manifested when she was preparing to have sex with her ex-boyfriend back in #3. So I hope I am not making undue assumptions when I surmise that your objection is not with sexuality in this comic in general, but with homosexuality in particular.

I think the issue is whether one considers sexual orientation to be a political/lifestyle choice or an inherent aspect of who someone is, like race or ethnicity. I subscribe to the latter viewpoint. What I find interesting is that the dividing line on this issue seems to be not politics but age, with younger Republicans like Meghan McCain saying in much greater numbers that they consider homosexuality not to be a choice (as do some older ones, like Dick Cheney). I know of at least one avid reader of Avengers Academy (Hi, Paul!) who is a diehard Tea Party Republican and loved issue #23 as much as all the others, so clearly there is some diversity of opinion even within conservative circles on this matter. I say all this not because I expect to change your mind, but hopefully to explain why I don't consider the Striker storyline to be pushing a political agenda.

I would respectfully disagree with some of your points, though. You ask when the last time I saw an opposite-sex kiss in a comic was. Well, I wrote one in issue #18, between Finesse and Reptil. I realize Mettle's not having lips makes it hard to define when he and Hazmat are kissing, but in issue #21 I think it's clear they don't mind getting physical. Giant-Man and Tigra have a loving, physical relationship, even if they try to be discreet in front of their students. As for religion, there are Christian heroes in our comics (Nightcrawler, Firebird) as well as Jews (Kitty Pryde, The Thing) and Muslims (Dust, Arabian Knight). Yes, the villains in #23 (the Purifiers, established X-Men bad guys) kill in the name of God, but as a Greek Orthodox Christian myself, I think it's obvious that anyone who kills in the name of Christ has missed something. I don't consider the Purifiers representatives of Christianity any more than I consider Al Qaeda representative of all Muslims. As for positive depictions of businessmen, how about Iron Man or Batman?

I say the above not to discount your feelings – I couldn't agree more that no one should buy a comic they don't like – but rather to clarify why I made the storytelling decisions I did and why I feel Marvel (and, really, comics in general) offers something for everyone, regardless of age, race or political affiliation. Thanks again for writing and I hope you do check out some of my other work. Unless it's necessary for the story, I really do try to keep politics out of it...because don't we all get enough in real life?

Christos Gage

NEXT!

Guest penciler Karl Moline (*Loners*) joins the fun, and – because you demanded it, Pilgrim – so do the Runaways!

Send e-mail to
MHEROES@MARVEL.COM
(please mark as OKAY TO PRINT)